

fig. 1 Cornelius Krieghoff, *The Shakspeare Club*, 1847, oil on canvas, 36 x 51 cm, McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal. (Photo: McCord Museum)

CORNELIUS KRIEGHOFF AND THE SHAKSPEARE CLUB

During the summer of 2000 a previously undocumented painting by Cornelius Krieghoff (1815-1872) was brought to Montreal's McCord Museum of Canadian History for examination (fig.1). The painting depicts an interior scene with a number of men seated around a table smoking and drinking. Certain artistic license and a conscious attempt at caricature have created a group portrait with great vitality. The painting is signed and dated on the rim of the top hat in the bottom left corner "C. Krieghoff / 47"¹ and it is also signed across the back of the canvas. The work was in a remarkably good condition and the only major conservation requirement was a surface cleaning that restored the painting to its pristine original state.

The painting was owned by several generations of the same family. When Dr. Arthur Browne died in 1905 he left it to his son Russell. After his death in 1923 it remained with his widow until 1943 when her son Dalzell inherited, but did not take possession of the painting. He left it in the care of his sister Pamela and eventually gave it to her. Mrs. Pamela Brodhead donated the work to the museum and the painting is now identified as *The Shakspeare Club*.² The original list of members of the Shakspeare Club includes a Col. L.G. Browne as an ordinary member and this may explain how the painting came into the Browne-Brodhead family.

The only extant documents of the Montreal Shakspeare Club are housed in McGill University's Rare Book Department and include a list of the membership as of May 25, 1847. Using that document and searching the McCord's Notman Photographic Archives for portraits of the members taken in the early 1860s, it has been possible to identify most of the men in the painting. In the upper right corner is Krieghoff himself, standing and smoking a pipe. Beside him, possibly taking a pinch of snuff or snubbing his nose, is James Gibb³ a prominent banker and lumber merchant from Quebec City. Gibb was not a member of the Club but an invited guest. The other figure seated beside Krieghoff has not been identified.

The men placed around the central table with its bright red tablecloth have all been identified. At the left of the table, blowing smoke in the air is John Young (1811-1878),⁴ a distinguished Montreal businessman and politician. At the time of the painting, he was a strong advocate of the St. Lawrence and Atlantic Railway's plan to build a rail connection between Montreal and Portland, Maine. Figure 2



fig.2 William Notman, The Hon. John Young, 1862, Notman Photographic Archives, Series 1-4160, McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal. (Photo: McCord Museum)



fig.3 William Notman, Frederick W. Torrance, 1864, Notman Photographic Archives, Series 1-12114.1, McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal. (Photo: McCord Museum)

shows the Hon. John Young as he appeared in 1862 when he was photographed at the studio of William Notman.⁵ About 1846 Krieghoff copied a painting *The Winetasters* after a work by Johann Hasenclever⁶ and used it as the basis of his own composition. Young's pose in *The Shakspeare Club* is similar to that of the right central figure in *The Winetasters* and even their frock coats are the same colour. To Young's right is Frederick W. Torrance who was a rising young lawyer and future judge and he is shown in Figure 3 seated in Notman's studio in 1864.⁷ The next standing figure is Edmund Allen Meredith (1817-1899)⁸ who had been appointed in 1846 to the unpaid and part-time position of Principal of McGill College and on May 20, 1847 he joined the civil service of the United Provinces of Canada. Figure 4 shows Meredith in 1863 seated in a rustic chair in Notman's studio.⁹ To his right is Sir Allan Napier MacNab (1798-1862)¹⁰ who was Speaker of the House of Assembly, which sat at Montreal at the time. He is listed in the membership roll of the Shakspeare Club as an honorary member. Figure 5 shows Sir Allan standing and holding a cane in a 1861 Notman photograph.¹¹ The adjacent man, with his gaze raised toward the ceiling, is Dr. A. Staunton, R.A. an assistant surgeon in the British army who had arrived in Montreal on 20 September 1845.¹² Krieghoff would have known Staunton before he joined the Club as he had produced at least two commissions for him in 1846 including *The Officer's Trophy Room*. That painting depicts Dr. Staunton in his quarters in the Notre-Dame Street East barracks and prominent amongst the objects in his room is a bust of William Shakespeare.¹³

In the right foreground and lighting his pipe is John Budden (1826-1918) of Quebec City, a member of the auction firm of A.J. Maxham and Company and a man who was to become one of Krieghoff's closest companions. Budden, like Gibb, is not listed as being a member of the Club but would have been an invited guest, probably by Krieghoff himself. Two of the figures remain unidentified; one of them might be the Club's founder Joseph Smith Lee, but there is no known image of him. Several of the objects in the painting are worth noting. The two substantial boxes on the floor contain port and tobacco, suggesting that although the men may be participating in a discussion or debate, they are also serious about the consumption of alcohol and the rituals of smoking. The Toby jug on the table is filled with spills, the waxed tapers that were used to light their pipes.

The Montreal Shakspeare Club was founded on September 18, 1843 and met regularly for the next six years. The Preamble to its Constitution reads as follows:

This club is formed for the purpose of cultivating a taste for elegant literature amongst such gentlemen as may be balloted into the society, according to the rules hereafter detailed, and also for the concentration of such amateur dramatic ability as may exist among its members; such ability to be considered available whenever it shall please the society to come forward to sustain a dramatic entertainment, either for the furtherance of a charitable object, amusement, or any other purpose; but it shall not be absolutely necessary for admission that every candidate shall be a dramatic amateur.



fig. 4 William Notman, Edmund Allen Meredith, 1863, Notman Photographic Archives, Series I-7588, McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal. (Photo: McCord Museum)



fig. 5 William Notman, Sir Allan Napier MacNab, 1861, Notman Photographic Archives, Series 1-25492.0.1, McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal. (Photo: McCord Museum)

By 1847, the year in which Cornelius Krieghoff's name appears in the list of ordinary members, the Preamble has been extended to read: "With this view, its constitution provides that it should hold regular and frequent meetings, at which original Essays should be read, and subjects of general interest debated."

The extant documents also include a typed letter, dated November 21, 1895 from William Kingsford to a Mr. McLennan, then secretary of the revived Shakspeare Club that existed from 1883 until 1902. In the letter Kingsford reminisces about the Shakspeare Club of the 1840s and the document helps to describe the Club in its time and place:

The Club was founded on the 18 September 1843, by Mr. Joseph Smith Lee, familiarly known as "Joe Lee." At that time he held a position in one of the public offices. One of, if not the master passion of his life, was love of the drama. He was always ready "to strut his brief hour upon the stage" and willingly entered into any scheme of amateur acting. His manners were very prepossessing. His reading had been entirely in the direction of dramatic literature and he really possessed a deep seated, honest admiration of Shakespeare, consequently he had studied much that was known of his life and works. He had been friendly with Mrs. Jamieson at Toronto, and it appeared to me, she had much influenced his character. His last years were not prosperous I fear, the reverse of happy. Those of his friends who knew what good was in the man, in spite of his weaknesses and prejudices would willingly forget them.

The first design of the Club, certainly with its founder, was to make it dramatic; for the encouragement of amateur acting. That theory, however soon passed away and the tone given to its meetings and proceedings was purely literary. The character of the meetings can be simply narrated: a paper was read, and the subject of which notice had been previously given was debated. The meetings were open to the public and were often numerous attended. It is proper, however, to mention that during the proceedings of the Club, in the six years of its existence there were occasional amateur performances in which Mr. Lee was the central figure. The writer of these remarks on two occasions appeared on the stage once as Martin Lessimer, in the "Wife of Seven Husbands"¹⁴ for the benefit of Mrs. George Jones, with others of the Club, and as Captain Amersfort in the "Loan of a Lover"¹⁵ for the benefit of Mrs. Gibb. On another occasion "The Rivals"¹⁶ was performed when Mr. Lee played "Captain Absolute" and Mr. Fleet "Fag...." In all these cases the actresses were professionals. The writer also wrote an address spoken by Mrs. George Jones on the night of the performance in the old theatre built by the Molson family near the corner of Bonsecours Street where the market now stands. Undoubtedly the best theatre ever built in Montreal as to its model and convenience....¹⁷ Amateur theatricals often were held at that date. The garrison

frequently gave such entertainments, open to the public, on payment.... In the old Molson theatre Mr. Dickens once acted: and the play bill is given in Foster's life of the novelist.

The first meetings in the Shakspeare Club were held in the Natural History Society's rooms in Little St. James Street. The Society kindly granting the use of them. As is known this building was subsequently abandoned and is now given over to offices, a new building under the auspices of Bishop Fulford in University Street was occupied, the one now in use.



As the members of the Club increased, the first floor of a building was obtained on the S.E. corner of St. Paul and St. Jean Baptiste Streets – I believe the building still remains.¹⁸ This was fitted up under Mr. Lee's direction with much taste and there the meetings were held until 1849. In this room the first dinner was held on the 18 September 1845, after that date the annual dinner was held at Tetu's Hotel, then at the corner of St. James & Bleury Streets, and these dinners became more or less an event while the Club lasted.¹⁹

Five reports of the Club were published 1844-48.... Reference to these reports will show the proceedings of the Club during these years while it lasted, its prosperity was unimpaired. Its disruption was caused by the transfer of the Government to Toronto in 1849.... This arrangement removed a great many members of the Club in 1849.

All of us who belonged to the Club entertained the most kindly recollections of it, and on all sides its unavoidable disruption was a matter of deep regret.... The members were men of education, with wise and kindly sympathies. There was a deal of camaraderie with us and the best feelings. Most of us were young with good animal spirits and gaiety of temperament. When we met at dinner we did not place our aestheticism in the board being decorated with flowers. As an incentive to complacency we brought good manners, consideration for others, gentleness, and conversation varying from seriousness to gaiety, often perhaps dashed with a little wild frivolity, but these meetings left no bitterness behind.

The Montreal Shakspeare Club was not a unique institution. By the mid-nineteenth century numerous clubs were found in most North American communities both large and small. According to Professor Peter Gibian:

A wide range of mid-nineteenth century Americans – from diverse backgrounds, social classes and regions – were as intrigued by the mercurial movements of conversation as they were by the magnetism and charisma of oratory. Indeed, they could not help but be affected by the workings of conversation. In this period, meeting and talking with others became not only a fundamental aspect of everyday private life but also a dynamic central to the workings of a number of public activities at the heart of civic society.²⁰

PROGRAMME		
Literary Exercises of  the Shakspeare Club,		
FOR THE WINTER SESSION OF 1849-'50.		
ORDER OF BUSINESS.		
LECTURE.....	MONDAY, NOVEMBER 8, 1849. MODERN REVOLUTIONISM.....	MR. FLEET.
LECTURE.....	MONDAY, NOVEMBER 15. ON NOTHING, (with Illustrations).....	MR. INVALDUS.
LECTURE.....	MONDAY, DECEMBER 2. ON SOME OF THE CHARACTERISTICS OF POETRY.....	MR. DUNN.
LECTURE.....	MONDAY, DECEMBER 17. Memoranda to all the various offices for 1850, will be called for.	MR. LINDING.
SECRETARY'S REPORT TREASURER'S REPORT	MONDAY, DECEMBER 24. General Election of Officers, to serve for the year 1850.	MR. HIMSWORTH. MR. ANDERSON.
LECTURE.....	MONDAY, JANUARY 1, 1850. ADDRESS FROM NEWLY ELECTED PRESIDENT.	
LECTURE.....	MONDAY, JANUARY 21. THE BROTHERHOOD OF MAN.....	MR. KING BARTON.
LECTURE.....	MONDAY, FEBRUARY 4. ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE GENIUS OF THOMAS HOOD.....	MR. LEE.
LECTURE.....	MONDAY, FEBRUARY 18.	MR. G. K. ROBERTSON.
LECTURE.....	MONDAY, MARCH 4. THE MEDICINE.....	MR. ANDREW ROBERTSON.
LECTURE.....	MONDAY, MARCH 18. BIKE AND PROGRESS OF COMMERCE.....	MR. S. LEVYER TAYLOR.
LECTURE.....	MONDAY, APRIL 2.	COLONEL BROWN.
LECTURE.....	MONDAY, APRIL 16. ON THE WRITINGS OF CHARLES DICKENS.....	MR. W. GORDON MACE.
LECTURE.....	MONDAY, APRIL 30. ON GASTRONOMY..... VALENTINOVY ADDRESS FROM 1ST VICE-PRESIDENT.	MR. W. S. LINDSAY.
 Club House, Great St. James Street, OCTOBER 25th, 1849.		W. A. HIMSWORTH, Secretary. D. G. DALY, Asst. Secretary.
<p>Memorandum.—On the intermediate Monday Evenings, during the Winter Session, the Society will meet for despatch of business, and conversation.</p> <p>Members will each receive six Tickets of Admission for their friends, which visitors are to be requested to deposit on the Drawing Room table on entering. They will be returned to the Members distributing them, by the Secretary, on the following morning, after being used.</p>		

Miss Perrier
21P 1852

fig.6 Programme, Literary Exercises of the Shakspeare Club, For the Winter Session of 1849-'50, Rare Books and Special Collections, McGill University, Montreal. (Photo: Notman Photographic Archives, McCord Museum)

In a second text, Gibian continues:

Founded on the notion of the representative individual, mid-nineteenth century oratory directs each man speaking to imagine himself as the society in microcosm, standing for all men and speaking for the social whole, a spherical self epitomizing in the coherence of his oration the integrity of the entire body politic. In conversation on the other hand, each successive speaker expressing *himself through the back-and-forth of dialogic interchange* is seen not as a self-contained whole but as part, one contributing voice in a larger multivocal system.²¹

In the United States, the American Conversation clubs or groups focused on the creation of a young nation's literary base. From the subject topics listed in the Annual Reports, it appears that the Montreal Shakspeare Club was based on the form of presentation used at the London Athenaeum, focussing on the Empire and historical topics as well as the study of Shakespeare and other British literary figures. For example in 1847, the year of the Krieghoff painting, William Kingsford presented a lecture "On the Antiquities of Athens" and Mr. Meredith "On the Influence of Slavery in the Republics of Greece and Rome." Debating topics for the year were extensive, a few being: "Is a Republic better fitted for the development of Talent than a Monarchy;" "Were the Allies justified in Banishing Napoleon Bonaparte;" "Does Phrenology deserve to be reckoned amongst the Sciences." The proposed schedule of programmes for the winter session of 1849-50 is illustrated in Figure 6. Although it was printed on October 28th, 1849, according to Kingsford's letter the season was not completed due to the departure of so many of the members.

Judging from the members list for 1847, the Club had become a prominent Montreal institution. There were twenty honorary members, eleven associates and seventy-eight ordinary members. Each member was issued with six guest tickets, so it was highly likely that a large group would attend the meetings. In conclusion, it is obvious that membership in the Montreal Shakspeare Club was most advantageous to Krieghoff's career. It permitted him access to a large group of influential and wealthy patrons from whom he could have hoped for commissions or the purchase of paintings.

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McCord Museum

Notes

- 1 Krieghoff also signed the painting on the brim of the hat in his 1847 *Portrait of John Budden*. See J. Russell HARPER, *Krieghoff* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1979), plate 79.
- 2 All printed documents pertaining to the Club spell Shakspeare without the usual "e."
- 3 In 1859 Krieghoff painted two paintings that included his Quebec City friend James Gibb. Both are illustrated in Dennis REID, *Krieghoff: Images of Canada* (Vancouver / Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre / Art Gallery of Ontario, 1999), plates 74, 75.
- 4 G. TULCHNSKY and Brian J. YOUNG, "John Young," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. X (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 722-28.
- 5 Notman Photographic Archives, McCord Museum of Canadian History, Montreal, Series 1-4160.
- 6 REID, *Krieghoff*, plate 7.
- 7 Notman Photographic Archives, Series 1-12114.1.
- 8 Peter OLIVIER, "Edmund Allen Meredith," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. XII (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 729-31.
- 9 Notman Photographic Archives, Series 1-7588.
- 10 Peter BASKERVILLE, "Sir Allan Napier McNab," *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Vol. IX (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 519-27.
- 11 Notman Photographic Archives, Series 1-25492.0.1.
- 12 HARPER, *Krieghoff*, 21.
- 13 REID, *Krieghoff*, plate 10.
- 14 Mr. Kingsford is writing nearly fifty years after the event and the title of the play may have been *The Wife of Two Husbands*, a drama in five acts, interspersed with songs, choruses, music and dances, written by William Dunlap (1766-1839) and published by D. Longworth, at the Dramatic Repository, Shakespeare-Gallery, New York, February 1811 and performed at the New York Theatre.
- 15 *The Loan of a Lover* was a one-act vaudeville written by James Robinson Planché (1796-1880) and published in New York and Baltimore by W. Taylor & Co., 1847.
- 16 *The Rivals* was a comedy by Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816), first performed at the Theatre-Royal in Covent-Garden, London in 1775.
- 17 Newton Boswell in 1839 wrote in *Hochelaga Depicta* that the Theatre Royal was situated at the corner of St. Paul and St. Denis Streets: "The theatre was built in 1825, by subscription, the late Hon. John Molson being the principal shareholder. The original cost was about £6,000. The late Mr. Forbes was the architect. It has a neat front with a portico of the Doric order. The whole is now the property of John Molson, Esq. Not only dramatic entertainments are performed here, but other public exhibitions are made when a large audience is expected."
- 18 Mr. Kingsford is in error here, as the Club had rooms over Chalmer's bookstore on Great St. James Street.
- 19 In addition to the annual dinner the Shakspeare Club dined occasionally at Dolly's or at the Rialto near Donegana's Hotel on Notre Dame Street; MSS notes in the Shakspeare Club file, Rare Book Department, McGill University.
- 20 Peter GIBIAN, *Oliver Wendell Holmes and the Culture of Conversation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 25.
- 21 Peter GIBIAN, *The Golden Age of Conversation*, unpublished manuscript.

CORNELIUS KRIEGHOFF ET LE SHAKSPEARE CLUB

Au cours de l'été 2000, une toile de Cornelius Krieghoff (1815-1872), jamais documentée jusque-là, a été soumise au Musée McCord d'histoire canadienne, à Montréal, pour examen. Le tableau, une scène d'intérieur, représente un groupe d'hommes fumant et buvant autour d'une table. Une certaine licence artistique et un essai délibéré de caricature donne une grande vivacité à ce portrait de groupe. Le tableau est signé et daté sur le bord du coin inférieur gauche : «Kriehoff 47» et il est signé également en travers de l'arrière de la toile. L'œuvre est dans un état de conservation remarquable et un nettoyage en surface a suffi pour lui redonner son aspect originel.

Le tableau est demeuré la propriété d'une même famille durant plusieurs générations. À son décès, en 1905, le Dr Arthur Browne l'a légué à son fils Russell. Au décès de ce dernier, en 1923, il est demeuré propriété de sa veuve jusqu'à 1943, alors que son fils Dalzell en a hérité. Il l'a confié à sa sœur Pamela avant de le lui donner éventuellement. Mme Pamela Brodhead a fait don de l'œuvre au musée et le tableau porte maintenant le titre de *The Shakspeare Club* (l'épellation sans «e»). La liste originelle des membres du Shakspeare Club comprend un certain colonel L.G. Browne en tant que membre ordinaire.

Les seuls documents existants sur le Shakspeare Club de Montréal sont conservés dans la section des livres rares de l'Université McGill et comprennent une liste des membres au 25 mai 1847. Ce document et une recherche dans les Archives photographiques Notman du musée McCord ont permis d'identifier la plupart des personnages du tableau. Krieghoff lui-même apparaît dans le coin supérieur droit de la toile, debout et fumant la pipe. À côté de lui, prenant une pincée de tabac à priser ou retroussant le nez se trouve James Gibb; l'autre personnage assis à côté de Krieghoff n'a pas été identifié. À gauche de la table, John Young laisse échapper des volutes de fumée dans une pose qui rappelle celle de la figure centrale des *Goûteurs de vin*, tableau de Johann Hasenclever que Krieghoff a copié et utilisé comme base de sa propre composition. À la droite de Young se trouve Frederick W. Torrance, suivi de Edmund Allen Meredith et de Sir Allan Napier MacNab. Leur voisin, dont le regard pointe vers le plafond, est le Dr A Staunton. Au premier plan, à droite, John Budden allume sa pipe. Des deux personnages non identifiés, l'un pourrait être le fondateur du Club, Joseph Smith Lee, mais on ne connaît pas de portrait de lui.

Le Shakspeare Club de Montréal a été fondé le 18 septembre 1843 et s'est réuni régulièrement pendant les six années qui ont suivi. Le préambule de sa constitution se lit comme suit :

Le club est fondé dans le but de cultiver le goût des belles-lettres chez les messieurs qui seraient admis dans la société selon les règles stipulées ci-après, et aussi pour réunir les talents amateurs pour le théâtre que l'on pourrait trouver parmi ses membres; afin que ces talents puissent être utilisés lorsqu'il plaira à la société de produire un spectacle théâtral.

Les documents existants concernant le Club comprennent aussi une lettre dactylographiée, datée du 21 novembre 1895, de William Kingsford à M. McLennan, alors secrétaire du second Shakspeare Club qui a existé de 1883 à 1902. La lettre rappelle des souvenirs du Shakspeare Club des années 1840 :

Le but premier du Club ... était d'encourager le théâtre amateur. Cette théorie fut cependant vite oubliée, et les réunions et débats prirent un ton purement littéraire. Le caractère des réunions peut être raconté simplement : on lisait une communication, et le sujet, dont on avait préalablement donné connaissance, était débattu. Les réunions étaient ouvertes au public qui était souvent nombreux.

Comme le rappelle Kingsford : «Les premières réunions du Shakspeare Club étaient tenues dans les salons de la Société d'histoire naturelle sur la petite rue Saint-Jacques». Comme le nombre de membres augmentait, le club s'installa au premier étage d'un immeuble situé à l'angle des rues Saint-Paul et Saint-Jean-Baptiste. Le Club publia cinq rapports entre 1844 et 1848 et durant des années «sa prospérité ne diminua pas». Le Club cessa ses activités en 1849, lorsque le déménagement du gouvernement à Toronto réduisit le nombre de ses membres.

Le Shakspeare Club de Montréal n'était pas une institution unique. Au milieu du XIX^e siècle, on pouvait trouver de nombreux clubs dans la plupart des villes nord-américaines. D'après les sujets énumérés dans les rapports annuels, il semble que le Shakspeare Club de Montréal ait utilisé le mode de présentation de l'Athenaeum de Londres, qui mettait l'accent sur l'Empire et des sujets historiques aussi bien que sur Shakespeare et d'autres écrivains britanniques.

À en juger par la liste des membres de 1847, le Club était devenu une institution montréalaise de premier plan. Il comptait vingt membres honoraires, dix-neuf associés et soixante-dix-huit membres ordinaires. Comme chaque membre recevait six tickets d'invités, il est fort probable que la participation aux réunions était nombreuse. Il est évident que l'adhésion au Shakspeare Club de Montréal était des plus avantageuse pour la carrière de Krieghoff. Elle lui donnait accès à un groupe important de protecteurs riches et influents qui pouvaient lui donner des commandes ou acheter ses tableaux.

Traduction: Élise Bonnette